The Twelfth Egg

Jenny is a ten-year-old girl who doesn’t talk much to others. She has a difficult time expressing her thoughts and ideas. She uses gestures to express her thoughts. Having conversations is something she has never experienced; however, she doesn’t miss them either. She doesn’t smile very much, which causes others to see her as unfriendly. She has a difficult time interpreting social cues. Often times, when others tell her a sad story, she will laugh. Because of this, she is seen as insensitive and weird by others. Jenny isn’t aware that others see her this way. She perceives the world much differently. Everything she does needs to be fair, structured, and logical. If someone called her Jennifer instead of Jenny, she wouldn’t be able to express her dissatisfaction. Instead, she would just scream out loud, but not towards the person. Jenny’s world and the world of those around her are completely different. Jenny struggles to fit into the other planet, but finds her own way of making connections within her own world.

Jenny is one of the twelve students in her fourth grade class. She is a smart student who doesn’t have any friends, but she loves eggs. She likes them so much that she even brings the same egg carton to school with her every day. Jenny never changes the eggs, because to her, they need to stay exactly the same way. No one has quite figured out why, but as one would expect, the eggs became very rotten. Imagine what one bad egg smells like, and multiply that by twelve. Jenny’s mom tries to swap out the stinky eggs for fresh eggs by replacing the egg carton. Her mom quietly places the rank egg carton in the garbage when she assumes Jenny won’t see or know. Jenny can always tell when the eggs are switched. Jenny picks out the putrid carton of eggs from the garbage and walks out the door to go to school.

People stare at Jenny because she carries an egg carton. Kids ask her, “Why do you have that carton of eggs?” or “Is there anything inside that?” Some kids even say, “That smells awful, just get rid of it.” Jenny never responds to these comments, but she sure protects her carton of eggs. She often pulls the egg carton away from people so they can’t see the eggs. She never lets the eggs out of her sight or her hands. She carries the carton wherever she goes around the school yard and in the building. When she rides the bus, no one can sit with her because she screams at the top of her lungs when someone sits near her. Other kids have learned not to sit with her because they don’t want to hear her yell. She doesn’t quite know how to use her words to ask the person to choose a different seat.

One day at recess, while Jenny was sitting next to her carton of eggs, a new boy named Richie walked up to talk to her. He was also a fourth grader at Jenny’s elementary school, but in a different classroom. Richie is a quiet boy who wears a smile on his face. He doesn’t know many students at school, as he just moved to the town two weeks ago. Since Richie was new, he isn’t aware that Jenny doesn’t really have conversations with people. Richie noticed how quiet Jenny was. As he went to sit down, she quickly pulled away her carton of eggs, as though she was afraid he was going to hurt them. Jenny didn’t say anything. Instead she stared at the egg carton, appearing as though she didn’t know how to respond. Normally other kids would say something about Jenny under their breath and walk away when she didn’t say anything. Not Richie. He was different. He sat with her and waited to hear her talk. Richie was disappointed when the end of recess bell rang and he had not heard anything from Jenny. He casually walked inside behind Jenny and her egg carton.

The next day at recess, Jenny sat down on the playground bench, her usual spot. Jenny always selected the bench tucked away under a tree where it was quiet, away from the bustle of the playground. This is where Jenny felt safe. She looked across the field as though she was looking for something…or someone. Richie wandered over and found Jenny sitting with her precious, smelly carton of eggs. When he arrived, Jenny didn’t pull her eggs away like yesterday. Instead, she left them sitting between her and Richie on that cozy playground bench.

As the time at recess passed, Jenny opened her egg carton and showed each egg and pointed out the slight imperfections of each egg. Jenny didn’t speak, but she used gesturing and pointing with slight facial expressions to show her meaning. After she showed him each egg, Jenny gently shook eleven of the eggs to listen for the sound each one made. They would listen as each egg made a different sound depending on how much yolk was inside. There was only one egg that Jenny wouldn’t let Richie see, hear or touch. It was the final egg, the twelfth egg. From what Richie could tell, this egg looked a little different from all of the other eggs, but Jenny took it away too quickly for him to see exactly how different it was. Jenny gave Richie the sense that he couldn’t know anything about that particular egg. It appeared as though this egg needed special handling and only a few people knew how to do that. Jenny held that one egg so close to her, that even when the bell rang and all the kids ran inside, Jenny stayed behind to make sure the egg was put back safely into the egg carton. She tucked it away tightly next to the wall of the egg carton and as far away as she could to the egg neighboring it.

The next day, Richie was outside at recess waiting for Jenny as he was intrigued by her interests and quiet nature. He really wanted to know more about the twelfth egg that he was able to catch a glimpse of yesterday. Expecting a nice quiet, uneventful fifteen minutes of egg inspecting, Richie wasn’t prepared. As Jenny casually walked through the field, she saw Richie waiting for her on the bench. Richie waved and she smiled back gently.

One of the children from Jenny’s class noticed that she was “hanging out” with someone at recess which was pretty unusual. He said, “Hey Jenny! What are you guys doing over here?” Jenny gave her usual silent reaction and her classmate walked away. As soon as he was gone, Jenny carefully opened the infamous egg carton and selected an egg after taking awhile to examine the external markings.

She held up the egg, pointed to the boy and smiled. With a realization to his tone, Richie said, “You mean that boy is an egg in your carton?” Jenny smiled back. Then she pointed to another girl, selected a different egg and grinned again. At this point, Richie caught onto the pattern and appreciated that Jenny identified each of the eleven other kids in her classroom as one of the eggs, based on the slight imperfections on the outside. Richie remembered there are twelve eggs to a dozen and he continued to wonder about that twelfth egg. With hesitancy, Jenny picked up the twelfth and final egg out of the carton. This egg was the smallest egg and it sat by itself on the outermost wall of the carton. The special packaging around the egg, clarified the need for the special handling it required. This egg was unique and fragile. It had a distinct feature of a small crack on the top of the egg. Richie asked Jenny if that was her and she smiled back. She held the egg in her left hand close to her, separate from the rest of the eggs, to keep it safe.

Suddenly the bell rang before Jenny could safely put the carton down. One student was running to line up and bumped into Jenny. Tragically, he knocked the carton of eleven eggs out of Jenny’s hand. All of the eggs cracked and smashed together on the ground. They left a big pile of yolky-mess. The kid didn’t stop. He kept running to line up. As Jenny stood and looked at the disaster of the eggs that reminded her of her classmates, she became upset. Jenny thought about the time she spent caring for the eggs and making connections with them as her classmates. As she stared longer at the egg mess, she realized that she could not longer see the differences between each egg. Jenny slowly knelt down to look at the mess on the ground. She began to grasp that despite all of the differences on the outside, the eggs were all the same on the inside. She looked at her tiny, unique, little egg that needed special care, and noticed that the tiny crack in her egg didn’t make her different anymore. All of her classmate’s eggs were cracked. Everyone was all the same on the inside, despite how they appeared to other people. Jenny thoughtfully tossed her small, slightly cracked egg into the pile of egg mush as she considered herself equal. Richie stepped slowly over to Jenny, as he recognized what just happened. He carefully looked Jenny in the eye and said, “I get it.” Richie acknowledged the connection that Jenny tried to make with her classmates, and understood Jenny’s new realization. Together, they ran to catch up with the other cracked eggs that Jenny calls classmates.